‘It’s not really about the food, it’s also about food’

Ulug, Ciska; Trell, Elen-Maarja

Published in:
International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development

DOI:
10.1080/19463138.2019.1696804

International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tjue20

'It's not really about the food, it's *also* about food': urban collective action, the community economy and autonomous food systems at the Groningen Free Café

Ciska Ulug & Elen-Maarja Trell

To cite this article: Ciska Ulug & Elen-Maarja Trell (2020) 'It's not really about the food, it's *also* about food': urban collective action, the community economy and autonomous food systems at the Groningen Free Café, International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development, 12:2, 127-142, DOI: 10.1080/19463138.2019.1696804

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2019.1696804

Published online: 02 Dec 2019.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF URBAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
2020, VOL. 12, NO. 2, 127–142
https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2019.1696804

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

'It's not really about the food, it's *also* about food': urban collective action, the community economy and autonomous food systems at the Groningen Free Café

Ciska Ulug and Elen-Maarja Trell

Department of Spatial Planning and Environment, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The Free Café is a citizen-driven collective in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands that serves a free meal biweekly, using food that would otherwise be thrown away. While principally attempting to create a space where financial pressures and social status are lifted, the group also works to raise awareness about the environmental and societal impacts of food. Using Gibson-Graham's community economies (CE) lens to analyse the Free Café, this paper aims to understand how urban citizen collectives are organised and governed, to better facilitate local action in food initiatives. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, this research focuses on the daily practices, interactions, organisation and challenges surrounding the Free Café, to draw lessons about urban collective action and CE. Though findings indicate internal conflicts and contradictions, through sharing its vision and opportunities, the café is found to be valuable to food-waste awareness-raising and experimentation towards sustainable post-capitalist societies.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 31 May 2019
Accepted 16 November 2019

KEYWORDS
Community economy; (urban) citizen collectives; collective action; diverse economies; autonomous food systems; Groningen; the Netherlands

Introduction

A restaurant where food is offered for free strikes a chord of cognitive dissonance for many consumers. *'Is it only for people who can't afford to buy food? Has the food gone bad? Do I want to be eating it?'* are questions one might ask when propositioned for a meal in such an establishment. These queries, raised by the idea of a free meal, open up interesting opportunities to start rethinking how we view food in today's society, what we consider to be 'good' in everyday practices, and how such perceptions might change through local collective action.

The Free Café, an urban grassroots initiative in Groningen, the Netherlands, is potentially a place that encourages people to redefine how they view the economy, their own role in it and their normative conceptions of food. This volunteer-run restaurant and community space collects and cooks food that would otherwise be thrown away, to create a free meal twice a week. More ambitiously, the Free Café attempts to eliminate money from all café processes, not only relying on volunteer work and free food, but also other resources made available through the community. The café's local popularity shows that an initiative operating on the 'fringes' can garner the means for survival and have a place in today's society.

Gibson-Graham (2006) see the intrinsic value and greater significance of exploring initiatives such as the Free Café. The authors propose a framework for autonomous community-driven initiatives as a means to explore diverse economic materialisations for moving towards post-capitalist societies. These 'community economies' (hereon CE)*'articulate a set of concepts and practices concerned with economic interdependence'* to '*offer potential coordinates for counter hegemonic projects of constructing "other" economies'* (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 79). Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, p. xix) posit a

CONTACT Ciska Ulug c.r.ulug@rug.nl Department of Spatial Planning and Environment, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Postbus 800, Groningen 9700 AV, The Netherlands

performative process to conceive of the economy *'as a situated and diverse space of ethical decision making and negotiated interdependence with other humans, other species and our environment.'* By doing that, the economy becomes, again, a space of agency (Constance 2017).

A non-hierarchical collective might resonate with the inner idealist, seeking to transform capitalist systems; however, there is often more than meets the eye. Many researchers agree that, despite its innovativeness, the diverse and CE frameworks heavily lack addressing internal power relations in such collectives (Kelly 2005; Sarmiento 2017). Kelly (2005) specifically points to '*decision-making and resource allocation*' as practices that '*are seldom free from the politics of personal gain and a communitarian ethos is not always easy to maintain*' (p.41). Following from this, it is essential to critically analyse decision-making and collective organisation in CE.

The importance of developing diverse economies is especially relevant with a growing number of initiatives seeking to address inequities in local and global food systems. Faults of the global-industrialised food system range from environmental degradation due to pesticide use and monocropping (Wingeyer et al. 2017), diet-related health epidemics (Nestle 2002) and human rights abuses of agriculture and food-chain workers (Madrigal 2017). Many of these issues can be traced back to a food system that incentivises profits over environmental and social justice. Therefore, in order to create sustainable food systems, we must advance in the direction of alternative/post-capitalist societies and ways of organising (Holt-Giménez 2017; Patel 2008; Peña et al. 2017). Citizen-led food movements are greatly endorsed as a venue of experimentation in order to move towards social and environmental change, also within global food systems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011).

The potential of CE to initiate a transition into sustainable agriculture and food systems has generated much interest. While Gibson-Graham's (2006) diverse economy and CE has been widely used in food system research (Gross 2009; Dixon 2010; Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016; Sarmiento 2017; Naylor 2018), the literature has focused primarily on food production practices (Trauger and Passidomo 2012; Cameron et al. 2014; Cameron and Wright 2014; Hill 2014) or meal-sharing (Veen and Dagevos 2019). This study differs from the aforementioned research through using the CE lens for exploring an urban collective engaged in reducing food waste. This perspective not only emphasises the diversity of ways in which collective action can materialise throughout the food system, but also highlights collective action in the spaces not addressed by governments or the market, despite, arguably, being a *by-product* of such practices (Holt-Giménez 2017; Mount and Andrée 2013).

Following from the above, by researching the Free Café through the CE lens, the aim of this paper is to explore ways in which urban citizen collectives are organised and governed, to better facilitate local action in food initiatives, and, ultimately, influence food system sustainability. After exploring the Free Café with a CE lens, this paper develops an argument about the ways local collective action, in urban citizen initiatives, contributes to responsible (local level) food-practices and illustrates the potential of CE for sustainable societies.

Community economies and local action

In the mid-1990s Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson began an on-going project to build a language around economic diversity, which came to be known as *diverse economies* (Larder et al. 2014). Gibson-Graham constructed what they called a post-structural political economy framework to re-conceptualise and redefine practices associated with the normative capitalist system. This restructuring differentiated from a regular market economy on three core points: transactions, labour and enterprise (Gibson-Graham 2006). Diverse economies was conceptualised to broaden the boundaries across these three junctures to include non-monetary and volunteer-based practices (Gibson-Graham 2006).

As a materialisation of the diverse economies framework, Gibson-Graham (2006) developed the concept of *community economies*, which outlines counterhegemonic economic practices to work towards economic interdependence of 'subjects, sites and practices' (p.81). More than a specific *kind* of economic practice or vision, CE is an *ethical approach* to economic practices and constructions. The underlying principle in re-socialising economic relations privileges *'care of the local community and environment'* (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 81).

CE are a *site of decision-making*, where economic practices are seen as *'inherently social'* (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 87–88). The aspects of 'practice' and 'decision-making' are, conversely, also the main aspects of this approach that have been heavily criticised, and

which this paper seeks to address through the case of the Free Café. CE have been considered utopian and disconnected from practice (North 2008) with some authors speculating whether 'alternative' economic practices are necessarily 'better' and encouraging the investigation of internal power relations, decision-making practices and governance of researched initiatives to better understand the potential of CE (Kelly 2005; Samers 2005; Sarimiento 2017). Furthermore, the CE focus of the 'local' has been greatly critiqued for not being transferable more broadly (Kelly 2005; Jonas 2013; Sarmiento 2017).

Critiques of the 'local' scale of CE are also directed towards community action in general. However, while largely concentrated on local level impacts, collectives involved in 'micro-transitions' may lead to tackling broader spatial and societal challenges (see, e.g. the relevance/impacts of Dutch renewable energy collectives, Rijksoverheid 2013). Recent years have seen an increasing number of local citizen initiatives and more formalised community collectives emerging in the Netherlands and beyond (Boonstra 2015). Whether they focus on generating renewable energy (Zuidema and de Boer 2017) or finding innovative opportunities for co-housing (Boonstra 2015), local community groups are taking an increasingly important role in promoting and facilitating responsible, sustainable and resilient environmental practices at the community level (Ulug and Horlings 2019). Furthermore, Dutch local governments and organisations are responding to this influx, through attempts to facilitate citizen initiatives, enhancing their impact (Bakker et al. 2012). However, attempts by local governments to embed collectives in their policy making must also be approached with caution and criticism. Citizen initiatives have been critiqued as *outsourcing* strategies by the government for civil society to take over responsibilities of the state, for example in maintaining open green spaces (Rosol 2012). While community action has benefits, on the local level and beyond, their presence, practices and facilitation efforts must still be executed and analysed critically.

Through focusing our analysis specifically on the organisational and governance aspects at the Free Café, this paper attempts to address the above concerns when discussing the potential for CE. Throughout the discussion and concluding sections, the aim is to draw lessons that might be relevant for understanding the potential of local collective action (for sustainable food practices/system) beyond the Dutch context.

Food waste initiatives: living indicators of the global food system

Food waste is an issue that has more recently attracted the attention of environmentalists, policy-makers and consumers-alike. Approximately 1/3 of all food produced on the planet is wasted, resulting in about 1.3 billion tons of food waste a year and detrimental social and environmental impacts on a global level, and within communities (Griffin et al. 2008; Gustavsson et al. 2011). To address issues of food waste, initiatives including 'social supermarkets', food banks and food sharing apps have emerged from both civil society and governments (Michelini et al. 2018).

However, these projects could be seen as 'band-aid' solutions, addressing the results of food waste, rather than the *causes*, which stem from both producers and consumers, necessitating collaboration from the market, state and civil society (Gustavsson et al. 2011). In an increasingly industrial and globalised food system, food is more likely to travel long distances due to international trade, negatively impacting food freshness and necessitating chemical additives to prolong shelf life (Gustavsson et al. 2011). Furthermore, industrialised food production has increased the amount of inexpensive food products in developed nations, making it easier for consumers to over-purchase and hoard food, activities linked to food waste (Griffin et al. 2008). Thus, on producer and consumer ends, food waste is argued to follow from our *capitalist* food system, which, like all capitalist systems, is based on the necessity to overproduce (Holt-Giménez 2017).

Consequently, by addressing the problem of food waste, initiatives such as the Free Café arguably not only *rely* on capitalist practices for surplus food, but also *fill voids* created by them. Mount and Andrée (2013) see the validity of bottom-up initiatives in food system governance, terming them forms of ''*post neoliberal' food governance'* visioning the potential for civic action '*in the local space vacated by broader liberal agendas*' (p. 588 and 580). Accordingly, the mere *presence* of citizen initiatives point to symptoms of flaws in the existing state of affairs. Kaika (2017) terms these activities *living indicators*, issues where urgent action is needed, indicated 'from below' by (local) citizen-action. In contrast to top-down technological measurements and institutional benchmarks, the idea of living indicators emphasises the significance of citizen initiatives as revealing

gaps to be addressed for development of more just *and* sustainable societies. The relevance of living indicators are further pronounced in the quest for visioning how to work towards and achieve urban sustainability (Williams 2010). With the current political climate, defined by extremes, the experimental space for less-formalised undertakings is expected to grow, resulting in a greater emergence of a diversity of initiatives as well as governance models (Marsden and Franklin 2013; Fickey 2011). The above highlights the relevance of researching decision-making processes underlying the (creative) potentials of citizen groups, notably in taking on roles not typically addressed by governments (Marsden and Franklin 2013). Thus, focusing on the Free Café as well as similar citizen initiatives, in particular the ways they are organised and governed, not only sheds lights on living indicators *'from below'*, but also provides direction for local government support and facilitation.

From theory to practice: exploring community economies at the Free Café

Contemporary food systems are strongly embedded in global economic models and connected to modern (urban) lifestyles. While alternative food networks are touted as a replacement to industrial modes of production, many argue that they in fact *reproduce* neoliberalisms (Allen et al. 2003; Guthman 2007). However, discarding customary neoliberal jargon could potentially take the conceptual power away from such processes and, instead, contribute to widening the capacities for other initiatives (Harris 2009). Gibson-Graham's (2006) lens similarly encourages developing a language around post-capitalist practices, reframing how they are conceptualised, as a way to expand the potential of autonomous spaces, including those around food (Wilson 2013; Davies et al. 2017).

CE begins with three main entry points: the *reframing* of economic practices, *re-subjecting* of ethical economic subjects, and collective action throughout these (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009; Trauger and Passidomo 2012). In the process of *reframing* economic practices, four points of discussion emerge, meant to '*inform an ethics and politics of the community economy*': (1) what is necessary, (2) how social surplus is appropriated and distributed; (3) how social surplus is produced and consumed; and (4) how commons are produced and sustained (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 88). More than guidelines, these coordinates or 'concerns' are meant to help guide the language of how CE could be developed through collective action.

While these four coordinates focus on specific economic acts, they, more importantly, each foreground governance and democratic decision-making processes around these practices. Thus, a closer examination of the organisation and governance of local initiatives should lend a critical analysis of CE in practice. The second and third coordinates of CE, for example, are based on decision-making processes around social surplus, which could include critically questioning inclusion/exclusion in governance processes, non-exploitative conditions of surplus appropriation and societal destinations of surplus distribution (Gibson-Graham 2006; Hill 2014; Drake 2019). Additionally, the focus on governing the commons, or communal resources needed for the survival of CE (Gibson-Graham 2006), lends a discussion to the accompanying material dimension, how collectives inhabit a space. These lines of inquiry further align with Wilson's (2013) interpretation of the poststructuralist political economy, which '*seeks to understand how the material interacts with the social and political*' (p. 726). In Wilson's (2013) analysis of autonomous food spaces, the author explores these spaces' potential to '*facilitate a deviation from mainstream (territorial level), processes for the de-commodification of food (material level) and practices that form new social relations (social level)*' (in Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, p. 928). The argument is, exploring also the physical space created, used and/or modified by the citizen collectives reveals important information about the values, identity and ways of working – in short, the ways the collective 'materialises'.

Building off of Renting et al.'s (2012) work on civil society-based governance mechanisms, we add CE to the picture (see Figure 1) to help visualise CEs' contribution to the nuanced role of civic initiatives, in relation to market and state actors. In this paper, we first explore the way the collective functions. The empirical results section of this paper first focuses on how the economy is *re-socialised* at the Free Café through the *social organization*, highlighting themes such as inclusion/exclusion, hierarchy (or the lack of) and participants' roles and responsibilities (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). Following the organisation section, this paper will more explicitly explore *decision-making processes* of the collective to gain a nuanced understanding of its governance. Throughout, the discussion will highlight enabling, as well as restricting factors faced by the collective.

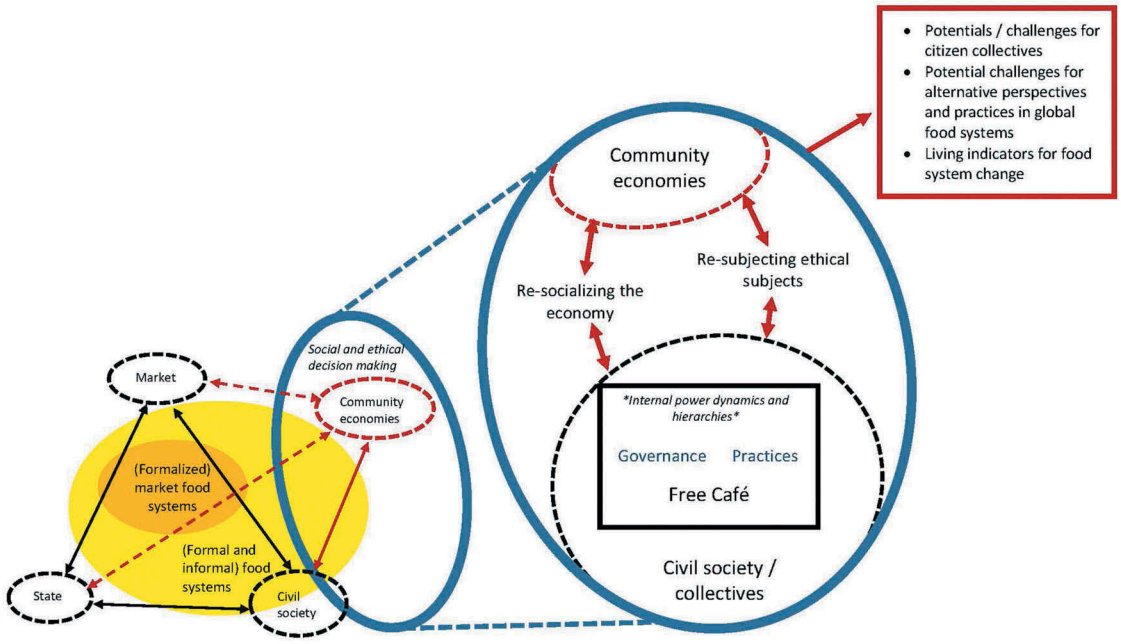

Figure 1. Conceptual model (inspired by Renting et al. (2012).

Secondly, this paper analyses the Free Café through '*resubjectification*'. Gibson-Graham 2006) argue that '*to change ourselves is to change the world, and the relation is reciprocal*,' necessitating an inwards analysis of individuals' experiences within CE (p. 127). Through this process of 're-subjecting,' participants internalise practices of the economy, to become, what Gibson-Graham (2006) term, *ethical communal subjects*. Relating to food, Sarmiento (2017) coins the phrase *ethical food subjects*, meaning, the embodied understanding and awareness of food issues (ex. food insecurity, inequality around accessibility, environmental implications), but also one 'who is *subject to* the ways in which their food practices impinge on the livelihoods, well-being, and life prospects of these myriad others' (p. 488, italics in original). Therefore, this part of our analysis directs attention to the participants of the café, in particular the fluidity of their roles and how collective practices were constructed around food (waste) and an ethical consciousness is expected to emerge.

Research methods and context

The Free Café is located in Groningen, the provincial capital and largest city in the North of the Netherlands comprised of ~200,000 inhabitants, approximately one quarter of whom are students. Despite its small size, Groningen's vibrant city life, left-wing politics and young population, contribute to the municipality's willingness to experiment and make space for citizen-initiated projects (Meesterburrie and Dupuy 2018). The city's enthusiasm around food is additionally reflected in the formation of a municipal food policy and regional food vision (Steel 2010; Gemeente Groningen 2013).

From 2014, the Free Café at Tuin in de Stad (Garden in the City) was open for meals every Wednesday and Sunday. After 1 May 2016 the café re-located to Backbone050, where it is open every Wednesday to date (2019)[1]. Volunteers pick up food the day before, start cooking at 14:00 and serve the meal at 18:00. One of the authors visited the Free Café approximately once every two weeks, from November 2015 until August 2016. The nature of these visits varied between volunteering in the kitchen and eating with friends – intentionally visiting the café in different roles to reflect on the potentially different experiences. Volunteering consisted of helping to prepare meals (including cutting produce, cooking and baking), washing and drying dishes and cleaning up the workspace. The participation was essentially entirely self-led, with no-to-little instruction from others, in line with the spontaneous

nature of the café. By spending time volunteering and engaging with the community, the author conducted participant observation (Bernard 2018). This method enabled gaining an inside perspective of the café's routine and planning procedures, to understand the context, different roles, practices, expectations and interactions, as well as provide a background for subsequent interviews.

In the ten months of data collection, approximately three to five informal discussions would take place during each observational visit (once every two weeks). Notes of these meetings were summarised and analysed parallel to interview data. Additionally, seven semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews with café organisers and volunteers were conducted (see Table 1). Participants for (formal) interviews were selected based on personal observations and tips from organisers. While the goal was to interview people with various levels of involvement, those who had (at one point) been involved in decision-making processes were prioritised. However, within this group, interviewees spanned different ages and livelihoods, representing diverse motivations and perspectives on the role and relevance of the café for the community. Also reflecting the broader pool of café volunteers, interview participants had alternative means of sustaining themselves, whether that was working freelance, part-time or flexible hours, living from student financing or loans, or receiving benefits from the government. The level of involvement of the interviewees is distinguished in the text below by using the terms *organiser, volunteer* and *visitor*. An organiser is an involved participant often responsible for opening and closing the cafe, and, thus, has a key to the space; a volunteer works at the café without responsibilities outside of day-to-day tasks (e.g. cooking or picking up food); and a visitor comes to the café, but does not help out. However, every role is dynamic, thus an organiser can come to the café as a visitor or a volunteer. Interviews were specifically useful to learn about motivations for participation, insights into organisational procedures and impacts of the café and its place in the community.

It should also be noted that many interview participants describe the Free Café as having an open atmosphere, where it is typical to strike up a conversation with strangers. This ease helped the researcher create contacts at the café. Café participants were happy to assist in data collection and often offered suggestions of potential interviewees. Prior to each interview the researcher asked participants to sign a consent form, stating the research purpose and that the interviews are voluntary, confidential and anonymous. All interviews and observations were coded, initially deductively, based on the aforementioned CE coordinates (what are the café needs, how is social surplus appropriated/distributed, produced/consumed, how is the commons sustained), foregrounding issues around the café's organisation and governance. Using inductive codes based on the internal power dynamics and hierarchies within these practices, the analysis cross-examined the data thereafter.

The Free Café: an introduction

The Free Café was developed by Iris and Rebecca[2] – two art students at the Minerva Art Academy in Groningen. They had the idea for a place that exists without money and without boundaries between people. Seeing food thrown away at the end of a market-day at the Vismarkt, a tri-weekly food market

Table 1. Interviewees.

Name	Age	Date of interview	Role at the Free Cafe	Everyday life role
Elias	60	8/5/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad, visitor and sporadic volunteer at Backbone	Copywriter, creative writing coach
Henk	27	3/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad, visitor but has not attended the café since it moved to Backbone	Planning student
Anna	26	8/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone	International Relations student
Steve	47	8/6/2016	Sporadic volunteer at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone	Capable, but refuses to work
Celia	52	15/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone – often led the cooking at both locations	Chemistry lab technician
Peter	53	30/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone – assisted with cleaning and food collection	Self-employed PC repairman
Robin	24	26/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad, visitor and sporadic visitor at Backbone – assisted with food collections and opening and closing the cafe	Psychology student

in the city centre, they connected their socially motivated idea to the environmental concern of food-waste and a space of a café (TedxUniversity of Groningen 2015).

In 2014, Rebecca and Iris found a location for the café at Tuin in de Stad, a plant nursery and community space, 10 bike-minutes west of the Groningen city centre. With support from interested community members, the team built a brick and mortar location adjacent to the nursery, consisting of an existing greenhouse and a kitchen constructed from found and donated materials. The existence of the café was disseminated throughout various networks in the city, including students from the Minerva Art Academy (and eventually other studies), curious patrons from Tuin in de Stad's established customer network, and, ultimately, the general public when local media picked up on the phenomenon (Jonker 2014; Bakker 2015). Today (2019), the Free Café attracts a diversity of participants and its success is evident through the café evenings – 40–80 people typically cram together for a free meal twice a week.

Since its fruition, the Free Café has encountered several changes: firstly, it expanded its food collection sites, from the Vismarkt, to grocery stores, bakeries and neighbouring farms, and secondly, the organisation changed. In autumn 2015, Rebecca and Iris announced their plans to start 'De Wandeling' – a spin-off café (Annot 2016). The initiators' break from the Free Café signalled the necessity for involvement from other community members. A group of approximately fifteen dedicated volunteers became involved in the collective through attending meetings, picking up food, and, perhaps most importantly, opening and closing the café. As an effort to add some structure, the owners of Tuin in de Stad required the Free Café to designate one person responsible for opening and closing. Along with those responsible for food pick-ups, the café 'openers and closers' were negotiated through a Facebook-group.

In early 2016, the café received news that the land where they resided would soon be turned into apartments. Tuin in de Stad had occupied the plot temporarily, with permission from the municipality, since a housing company that owned the land had to cease construction due to the 2008 economic crisis. When the economy recovered in early 2016, the municipality notified Tuin in de Stad that they must vacate the plot by 1 August, and the latter asked the Free Café to leave three months prior, on 1 May 2016 (Henk Interview 2016).

While the organisers of the café knew their residency was temporary, this news was, nonetheless, shocking. The café was notified to leave a few weeks prior to the exit date and, by posting on the Free Café Facebook page and reaching out to their networks, they attempted to find a new location without missing a week. Café organisers, including interviewees Peter, Celia and Anna, were successful and hosted the first week of the new café, termed '*Restant Restaurant*' ('Leftover Restaurant'), on Wednesday 4 May at 'Backbone050'. Backbone050 (or 'Backbone' for short) is a former school located in the neighbourhood Vinkhuizen, five minutes further west from the previous café location. Since the school closed in the 1980s, the space hosts a range of socially based initiatives such as theatre groups and youth programs (Backbone050 2016).

Free Café and community economies

The following section analyses the Free Café through the framing of the CE. Focusing on how the economy is 're-socialised' through the organisation and governance of the collective, as well as 're-subjected' in producing alternate subjectivities of its participants, this section seeks to highlight a critical analysis of alternate economic spaces and the implications for local collectives, such as the Free Café.

Re-socialised economic practices

Social organisation

The Free Café was created from the principle that it would be built (and run) 'without money', assuming that when money is not involved, hierarchy and issues, associated with more top-down institutions, would disappear. While the absence of money is a relatively unique characteristic of the Free Café, what is more relevant when connecting the case to CE is the enactment of ethically negotiated action. If anything, the collective's assumption that the lack of monetary exchange would result in a 'lack of hierarchy' raised a number of questions in this research, specifically with regards to the decision making at the café. If CE are visioned as a gateway to more just and sustainable societies, such questions are also relevant, as is the distribution of power and privilege in such initiatives, in practice.

While many volunteer-run initiatives rely on structured labour to keep members accountable, the Free

Café has always been 'loosely organised'. Besides designating a participant to open and close the space, no additional 'formal' roles were created. Steve, a regular volunteer, describes café procedures as *'really a sort of anarchy,'* where there are enough people to prepare the food and clean up, but no structure was ever implemented.

The ostensible lack of order allows café procedures to prioritise creative experimentation over established conventions, potentially also contributing to the charm of the café. Elias, a long-serving volunteer, states:

> It was sometimes kind of a miracle that with minimum organization, or no organization, for so long, there were almost always people just coming, saying "well is there anything to do?" and it just worked.

Despite the lack of formal roles, many participants would help out and eventually find a niche in the café based on personal preferences, reflecting how a structure did creep into the Free Café organisation. Peter, an organiser accountable for opening and closing the café, noted that, though he enjoyed his responsibility, he finds it necessary to be replaceable and that *'it's important that we are not dependent'* on one person. At one point, a small group of café participants took on too much responsibility, resulting in many becoming exhausted and relinquishing their involvement, leaving the café with a deficiency of volunteers. While, before, many volunteers came through word of mouth, after this shortage the group made an intentional effort to diversify roles and seek volunteers through advertising on social media accounts and around the café to ensure the collective's longevity. Thus, the lack of reliability points to a drawback of volunteer-based non-capitalist initiatives and relying solely on spontaneity (Firth et al. 2011), and a potential challenge in CE and the long-term durability of them.

The absence of money, a key characteristic of the Free Café, re-conceptualises the economy through voluntary action, saving food that would otherwise be discarded, and not accepting payment for meals. Participants viewed the 'without money' principle as a part of their intention to create an inclusive and open environment at the café and redistribute power to the community. Henk [organiser] illustrates:

> For us it was the idea that there is a place everybody feels welcome, where no money is involved, because when there's no money involved there's no distinction, there's no hierarchy.

This ideal is embedded in café structure, as well as materialised throughout practices around food. For example, when cooking, no formal meal planning is implemented. Celia, one of the organisers and a regular cook, explains:

> We just use our imagination … there's no hierarchy, it's just everybody who likes to do something with it [the food], just does it.

The lack of formal hierarchy in the café could be contrasted with market economies, where, it can be argued, there is a greater prevalence of hierarchies in monetary and labour relations (Wilson 2015), for example, between employer and employee or customer and business owner. Thus, by challenging these relationships, the café attempts to create a space without explicit hierarchies, and, consequently, alternative ways to interact and connect. This is likewise illustrated by the blurring of formal roles between visitors and volunteers. Robin, a student involved in the early development of the café, observes that *'most of the people I saw at the café, sooner or later I also found in the kitchen.'* While both extremes of involvement are present, no one is obliged either way. Regardless of discernible roles in the café, one's value does not change based on the responsibilities they carry out. Robin, an organiser at Tuin in de Stad and later visitor, reflects:

> When I came to the café from the first moment on, I wasn't valuing in my mind someone who was chilling on the couch, cleaning dishes, making food, smoking a cigarette outside, or reading a book differently. My valuing of people works quite even and same … because none of your members is more important than another member.

Thus, in some way, the Free Café attempts to challenge the valuing of labour and quietly deconstruct notions of value, an element also found in other alternative economic spaces and movements (North 2007; Jonas 2009; Fickey 2011). Distributing responsibilities among involved actors reinforces such customs and maintains the non-hierarchical structure, to allow ownership and control to be shared as well.

In the same vein, many participants greatly emphasised the Free Café's inclusiveness as one of its defining features. For example, Celia [organiser] noted that, though she enjoyed cooking, *'if there are enough other people to cook then I step aside because I want to give everybody the opportunity to do something,'* demonstrating how volunteers are integrated into the

café's operation and given a place in the initiative. While this intention might hold true, the authors also noticed a tendency of organisers and veteran volunteers to take over cooking duties, while the prep-work was left to more 'novice' volunteers, illustrating a subtle hierarchal structure and division of roles in the café's kitchen. While this could be the volunteers' choice, the overvalued absence of structure could be discouraging for those not accustomed to the café's practices, or those uncomfortable taking initiative, and thus result in unintentional exclusivity. Regardless of formal processes impeding participants from joining the collective, relying on well-intentioned volunteers ignores an explicit system of checks and balances. Thus, to some extent, the Free Café still reproduces power relations seen in more 'mainstream' or 'market' economies, despite operating in a 'non-capitalist' space.

Overall, the intentions of the social organisation of the café could be summarised as being non-hierarchical and inclusive, albeit chaotic. While, the first two, might be in-line with evidence of other CE, they are, nevertheless, debatable. Is the lack of organisation or formality simply a disguise for the ever present and more informal hierarchies? The potential disparity between intention and practice will be deconstructed further in the following section on decision-making.

Struggles with decision-making and fragmentation

Throughout discussions with interviewees, many understood the lack of formal governance processes and hierarchical roles to be defining characteristics of the Free Café. While, perhaps, all participants are envisioned as equal in café activities and decision-making practices, the spontaneous, unstructured chaos left many frustrated with the organisation style, as also suggested by interviewees.

While the Free Café collective held regular meetings in the initial launch and first transition period (after the departure of the original founders), many respondents dismissed these meetings as ineffective or unproductive, downplaying democratic means at the café, and contributing to a gradual dissolution of formal roles in decision-making processes. Despite their impracticality, several organisers, including Elias and Peter, mentioned that meetings are still *'interesting to hear what other people are thinking,'* implying that it was a space where participants had a voice. As an alternative, decisions became more frequently made through digital platforms, such as a Facebook group message among café organisers. Not only does this medium assume a certain financial status and technological capacity, but also, unlike the 'real life' meetings, these groups were also not openly advertised, and therefore not open to the general public. Yet, many interviewees noted the convenience and depth the digital platform allowed, not possible in physical meetings through, for example, ensuring that everyone can voice their concerns – without time limits and overpowering personalities. Consistent with the nature of the Free Café, the Facebook messages were also described as chaotic, with multiple groups existing simultaneously, and many group members failing to respond.

Decision-making changed more drastically after the café moved to the Backbone location, resulting in a so-called 'stress-induced hierarchy'. While a larger group was involved in meetings at Tuin in de Stad, after the relocation, this group condensed to four to six people who negotiated decisions among themselves. Celia [organiser] states:

> At Tuin in de Stad we had a larger group that was responsible, and we had a lot of meetings, but when you have ten people, you have ten different opinions, so sometimes it was hectic.

Peter [organiser] agrees, noting that before '*it was always a bit unclear who was the organiser*' for opening or closing the café a given evening. However, other participants, such as Henk [organiser at Tuin in de Stad], found the new, smaller group limiting and '*not really open to let people be a part of the project*'. He witnessed this surfacing in the café's relocation to Backbone:

> There were five or six people who found the new place, Backbone … There was no meeting or discussion about where to go, what to do, where and how – they thought, we just continue without involving people and so there was a small tiny group … for me that was really disappointing. I really wanted to involve everybody within the Free Café so everybody who came at six … and now, the Backbone crew closes that door.

While involving all Free Café participants follows the initial ideals, the short notice for the relocation limited such processes. As Steve [volunteer] explains: '*after 3 or 4 months, getting started again is much harder than keeping going because now we have all the contacts with the supermarkets, with the bakeries, with each other and all that*'. Such contacts were essential to maintain as they '*are counting on [the Free Café] as well*' to take care of their waste, illustrating how the Free Café relies on a tenuous group of (external)

actors and processes for its existence. However, even with the collective managing to locate a new space, retain the food suppliers and preserve the initiative, the relocation nevertheless transformed the weekly dinners.

The material consequences of the hurried decision-making processes emerged with the relocation to the Backbone050 location. There, the collective was permitted to occupy the space indefinitely and rent-free, in agreement with the coordinators of the foundation. While the kitchen at Backbone was superior in terms of facilities and spaciousness, many visitors complain that it lacks the same atmosphere found at the Tuin in de Stad location.

In addition, compared to the space they built themselves, participants were lent a shared space in an existing building and, consequently, found that they had less control and autonomy in personalizing it. Peter [organiser] illustrates:

> What I find important is that we can give such a place [the shared Free Café space] our identity and that's a problem there [Backbone050] … I don't feel that this is our place.

The appearance and atmosphere at the two locations differed drastically – the café area at Tuin in de Stad, built by community members using reclaimed materials, allowed the café to embed the same ideals it stood for. Many participants commented how the Tuin in de Stad location felt *gezellig* – a Dutch word roughly translated to the feeling of being cosy with friends, with the dining area meant to feel like a 'living room' (Figure 2a). This further embeds the idea of the café being 'without money' as Peter, one of the organisers, explains, *'when you go to friends, you get food there … you don't have to pay for it,'* also highlighting the added social potential that can exist in non-capitalist spaces.

In contrast, visitors can freely inhabit the large space in Backbone (Figure 2b), so, even if the actual number of visitors remained comparable, the space felt emptier.

Through the relocation of the Free Café, visitors, volunteers and organisers began to question the identity of the café and the crucial elements for its survival. It became apparent that, while many participants claim that the café is inherently both: a social meeting place and an environmental initiative, some participated for the social aspects and others based on environmental concerns and food saving, For Henk [organiser at Tuin in de Stad], for example, the food did not matter since he visited the café mostly for the social interaction. *'If there's only soup, yeah, I don't care, I just eat soup and when I'm back home, I cook my own meal,'* he explains. While this perspective assumes participants do not attend the café due to food insecurity, the example also illustrates how the social atmosphere of the café is intertwined with its purpose as a food-waste initiative. Alternatively, Anna [organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone] states, *'it's a bonus that it's a social event, but the main part for me is the food saving.'* These differences, along with the lack of a formal structure also potentially result in a feeling of transience in the collective. Elias [Tuin in de Stad organiser] elaborates, saying:

> There are some ties between people … but it's not really a community. I used to think that every now and then but then I see it changes too much … the group of people is changing all the time.

This quote illustrates a level of fluidity and fragmentation the café experiences. However, while the 'Tuin in de Stad

Figure 2. (a and b) The Free Café locations at the Tuin in de Stad (left, courtesy of Marin Leus) and Backbone050 (right, source: author).

era' Free Café never returned, the new spin-offs located at Backbone and de Wandeling not only still exist today (2019) but are arguably equally as 'successful' on their own. Thus, perhaps, such struggles are not to be discounted and overlooked, rather viewed as opportunities for further transformation. Despite its challenges, Gibson-Graham (2006) remind us '*building community economies will always be a process of experimentation, choices, and failures, as well as successes, and indeed that success and failure are subject to interpretation*' (p.191). Despite the idealism of collective action, interdependent collectives could be equally successful 'cracks' in the system (Holloway 2010), compared to a chaotic and disjointed whole. The dispersal of café participants to these other initiatives suggests the necessity to visualise the flexibility of the Free Café and its associated activities through a relational perspective (Holloway et al. 2007). Meaning, the café practices do not occur in a 'bubble' and nevertheless still interact with the greater city of Groningen and its inhabitants – potentially raising awareness but simultaneously creating dependencies between the 'autonomous' system and its wider context.

Ethical food subjects: re-subjecting at the Free Café

Gibson-Graham's (2006) focus on the *politics of the subject* necessitates the *transformation* of the self as well as building capacities to '*acquire those mental and emotional elements required to build an alternative space instead of a mere confrontation with capitalism*' (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, p. 923). While the creation of an ethically negotiated space connect the Free Café to the CE, cultivating subjects who are open and actively working towards economic constructions beyond capitalism is vital for maintaining the collective, meeting their goals and constructing spaces of possibility (Gibson-Graham 2006). This section focuses on how a shared consciousness among cafe participants emerges through involvement in the initiative.

Many participants with pre-existing experiences of disengaging from capitalist society (e.g. squatting or being unemployed), connect their motivations to the Free Café. For example, Steve, a volunteer, notes:

> Making more profit … is completely stupid, but that's how our [mainstream/capitalist] system works and there's nothing I can really do about it, I just don't participate. And in a thing like this [the Free Café], I love to participate.

According to Steve, little can be done to change the 'system', except, perhaps, not participating. The Free Café, however, provides an opportunity to contribute to developing an alternative.

While food saving sets the Free Café apart from other food-related establishments, the meals mimic a 'normal' experience in that they are served in three 'standard' courses (soup and bread, main course dishes and dessert), a format followed in order to make the free meal feel '*as rich as possible*,' according to Celia [organiser], alluding to how sensorial indulgence can compensate for the absence of money. Contrary to a typical restaurant experience, at the Free Café it is perfectly normal to visit alone, sit at a table and meet other strangers. The authors often noticed this unique feature, either as visitors arriving alone or witnessing guests openly integrate strangers into their mealtime conversations, an example that the café became '*a place where engagement with the stranger is enacted … the place of exposure … [and] the crossroads where those who have nothing in common meet to construct community*' (Gibson-Graham 2006, citing Nancy 1991). Sharing a meal, thus, points to ways in which the Free Café attempts to '*resocialise economic relations*' creating a community at the café (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, p. 923).

Many guests are additionally confronted with the café's unconventional nature when offering money at the end of their meal and learning their payment is not accepted, an experience witnessed by the author when dining with a friend on her first visit. Said companion insisted the group stay to assist with washing dishes after eating, as a way to 'repay' the café in another manner. While there is no obligation, acts of reciprocity and opportunities for participation (volunteering or eating) further broadens the Free Café's resource base. This further highlights the praxis embedded in autonomous spaces where '*the process is as important as the outcome of resistance*' where embedding reciprocity and resourcefulness into norms and procedures constructs a community based on solidarity (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, p. 738).

As evidenced through observations, many clienteles eventually accept the practices/norms described above and become accustomed to the café's departure from more traditional establishments. This adjustment is evidence of the Free Café as a space of self-formation, or a process of 're-subjecting' and becoming *ethical communal subjects* – an integral characteristic of the community economy framework.

Sarmiento's (2017) *ethical food subjects* is additionally relevant to Free Café practices, which acknowledge and embed consequences of global food systems on a local level. Transgressing social barriers, omitting conventions of paying for food and, simultaneously, introducing ideas of eating food 'waste' are examples of ways in which the café attempts to contribute to a 'micro-transition' towards unorthodox social, food and economic practices. The introduction of ethical food subjects can help us understand how these practices become embedded in the community, indicating the impact of the café on its participants and in the community in raising awareness around food-waste and unconventional economic models.

While the data above indicates the existence of a shared consciousness around food and economic practices in the café, we argue for the necessity of such a mentality for the sustainability of the initiative, especially throughout the transition phase (i.e. looking for a new space). The principles described above (meeting strangers, not accepting money for meals and eating food 'waste') are consistent in all versions/locations of the Free Café (at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone) and could be considered core components of the café, as discussed by participants.

While, as illustrated above, the relevance of the physical space should not be undervalued, at the core, it is a social project. The unique values and acceptance of these through café participants is indicative of the project's survival – as a collective. While Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest the potential for change among economic subjects, necessitating a shared set of values could indicate unintentional exclusion, for those that don't and are not willing to align themselves with such an initiative. This could prove challenging for such citizen food initiatives and the greater potential of a 'micro-transition' towards ethical and sustainable food and economic practices.

Local collectives: impacts and changes?

While a complete food system overhaul is a daunting task, working on a small scale allows citizen-based initiatives to experiment with local-level change. Despite starting amongst friends, Free Café's popularity is evident among Groningen residents, as well as from city officials and other Dutch towns that have since mimicked the project (Stadslandbouw Dordrecht 2016). The café's success, however, could also be attributed to its alignment with the municipality's commitment to community food involvement and its support for citizen-driven initiatives through the municipality food policy and regional food vision (Steel 2010; Gemeente Groningen 2013). While expenses such as rent and utilities are required for such local initiatives, municipal regulations were adjusted to pay the rent thus to some extent ensuring the longevity of the initiative. The close interaction and collaboration, formal connections and resources made available (directly and indirectly) by the local municipality as well as businesses raises questions about whether the Free Café in fact exists within or outside the 'mainstream' capitalist system. This differs from many autonomous citizen projects, for example freegans or dumpster divers (Gross 2009), which might position themselves in opposition to governmental bodies (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). The cooperation and further experimentation of citizens and officials reveal an interest in citizen-driven food system engagement and the potential for their growth.

An oft-cited critique of CE, and local initiatives more generally, is their limitedness to the local scale. However, by framing the non-capitalist space in the context of active citizenship, there is a greater potential to initiate interaction with local officials and governments (Boonstra 2015). Furthermore, while many local governments utilise 'sustainability' and 'creativity' to disguise market-led responses to urban environmental sustainability (Lederman 2015), this research illustrates otherwise. Reflecting on how governments are planning in an age of active citizenship provides the opportunity to imagine how a non-capitalistic future can be materialised, through such citizen initiatives. Our findings indicate that local initiatives like the Free Café provide a space to participate, experiment and address societal and environmental concerns of the community. Ultimately, the café is an opportunity for citizens to engage in sustainable and socially just practices, and produce 'living indicators', best illustrated by the words of Anna, for whom the Free Café is a *'movement against … that element of society that is overproducing'*. Collecting and serving food otherwise destined for the bin, the Free Café attempts to raise awareness around and mitigate food waste, allowing this opportunity to *'forge new identities, which can rebuild solidarities and teach about the multiscaler workings of economic globalization'* through autonomous action (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, p. 736). It could be argued that re-conceptualising food waste attaches value to something dictated as 'trash,' confronting consumer perceptions of what 'good' food is, and redefining food as well as

economic practices (Gross 2009). This could be conceptualised as a micro-transition that allows citizens to challenge intertwined dominant structures through everyday practices, whether it is an excessively wasteful food system or capitalistic economy (Hassanein 2003). Occupying a space to cook and serve food to the public, without involving money, provides the means to re-conceptualise the economy and open up a space of possibility and transition. This interpretation aligns with Wilson's (2013) study on autonomous food spaces, where *'food is both a site and the means for building worlds beyond capitalism'* (p. 734). Food and customs around food are essential in engaging citizens and constructing a space without money. When asked about the role of food at the café, the majority of participants agreed that *'it's not really about the food, it's also about food … without food it wouldn't be what it is,'* Peter argues, illustrating how food and food saving are inherent to the café's impact. Although all respondents manifested an interest in food served at the café, food system change was not the primary grounds for involvement, rather, most participants appreciated the social atmosphere. However, the central role of food in creating such atmosphere cannot be undervalued. The analysis of the Free Café highlights struggles of such initiatives, including the temporality of space, volunteer deficiencies and internal conflicts. Employing the CE lens generates a language around these 'other' economies, as well as ascribes value and builds a space for those participating in these alternatives.

Conclusion

Inspired by Gibson-Graham's (2006) idea of CE, this paper explored an urban citizen initiative – the Free Café – as a case of a 're-socialised' economy. The paper discussed CE through focusing on three core points: the social organisation, the decision-making and the 're-subjectation' or the emergence of a shared consciousness among participants in the Free Café context. Aiming to exist without money and saving food that would otherwise be thrown away, the Free Café is an example of a food-based citizen initiative that attempts to balance its idealist intentions with pragmatic actions, for example actions for carving out a place for itself in the context of the city of Groningen.

While the aim of the collective is to be 'non-hierarchical', the findings of this research illustrate that, as the initiative evolved and the initiators stepped down, decisions were increasingly made by a smaller, self-selected group of people. Thus, the assumption that may be held about the lack of money leading to a lack of hierarchical relations proved incorrect in the context of the Free Café, as the café witnessed an eventual rise of a loosely organised hierarchy with differentiation in roles and responsibilities between different café participants. This contradiction between the initial intentions of the participants of the café for a 'spontaneous, non-hierarchical, informal' space and the daily 'operational' realities of the collective was one of the most prominent paradoxes which emerged from the findings of this study. Initially, the initiative seemed to be operating under a sort of informal spontaneity, which was also emphasised by the respondents as an important characteristic of the café. However, after observations and participation in café activities, an underlying structure/organisational reality emerged. Participants seemed to prefer certain roles in the daily activities of the café, and, perhaps more importantly, there seemed to be a difference between who is more or less 'in charge' or feels responsible for, for example, opening up the space. While this 'structure' was never explicitly negotiated or implemented, it, rather, emerged and became one resembling a hierarchy over time. With internal and external stressors, such as differing motivations and a forced relocation, the collective also gradually became more fragmented. These findings illustrate the need to take a critical view of the 'unintended' hierarchies and power relations that may exist or potentially develop in CE. While it may be necessary or, arguably, inevitable for certain participants to take on more responsibilities than others and take the lead in order to safeguard the survival of an initiative, creating a hierarchy might be challenging when it 'simply emerges', is not negotiated with other group members, and clashes with their expectations and ideas. That being said, the emergent structure and associated (loose) hierarchy is not necessarily a drawback. While the new 'organisation' could be seen as compromising initial ideas about the way the café is structured, it, nevertheless, allowed the café to continue to operate according to their values of openness and inclusivity, standing in contrast to more conventional economies. This could be a valuable lesson for future CE initiatives in involving their community, framing their organisation styles, and being reflexive to redistribute power to the community.

Through analysing CE in a food-waste initiative, this research addresses a gap in the literature where diverse urban food (sharing) interventions '*remain largely invisible*' (Davies et al. 2017, p. 136), also highlighting how resourceful community groups emerge in the space not addressed by governments and capitalist markets and mobilise citizen action for food system change. However, the position, potential contribution, and role of such initiatives is far from straightforward, as the presence of 'autonomous' initiatives necessitates interaction with pre-existing (capitalist) 'systems'. In the case of the Free Café, this is specifically seen in their reliance on surplus (industrial) food, which also underlines the nuances around 'alternative' or capitalist/non-capitalist food systems (Wilson 2013; Watts et al. 2014; Sharp et al. 2015; Veen and Dagevos 2019). However, rather than understanding the potential of food-waste initiatives such as the Free Café through this dualism, perhaps the weight of the Free Café lies in its existence as a 'living indicator' (Kaika 2017), pointing the attention to the wastefulness of the capitalist/mainstream food system and to the necessity to take action.

This paper opens up the box to many more questions for further research including the role (and potential) of citizen action in a transition to post-capitalist sustainable food systems and economies, whether and how to replicate and expand such projects, and the spatial/material dimension of CE. Local community-based food system practices could provide a direction for exploring materialisations of non-capitalist spaces (Dixon 2010). While the Free Café is viewed by many visitors, volunteers and the city government as an example of how a non-capitalist and more sustainable future could be materialised (Deuten 2015), unearthing internal power relations and external constraints is necessary for recognising the nuances surrounding local collective action and when discussing their potential role and contributions to a transition to a sustainable future.

Finally, the potential role of this and similar citizen initiatives in a transition towards more sustainable futures is well captured in the concept 'spaces for possibility' by Marsden and Franklin (2014). By coming together at the Free Café, the visitors, volunteers and organisers have the opportunity to contribute to co-creating a vision and practices for a sustainable future. Even the smallest acts of coming together, experiencing different (economic) realities and reframing what is considered 'good food', are opportunities for experimentation and inspiration for change. As Robin [organiser at Tuin in de Stad and, later, visitor] admits:

> Most people will tell you that you're not thinking straight and that this [the Free Cafe] will not work. From the point of view that you can inspire people … [the Free Café] is quite valuable I would say – it creates more than the action in itself, it's more than the event itself.

Notes

1. Since data collection ended, a second Free Café location opened at *Edanz*, a former elementary school-turned neighbourhood education and creativity centre that hosts other events, such as meditation and art classes.
2. All names are changed to preserve anonymity.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to particularly thank all of the research participants for enthusiastically taking part in the data collection and patiently donating their time and energy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Ciska Ulug is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spatial Planning and Environment at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her PhD research looks at the role of community-based food collectives for greater food system sustainability, with case studies also looking at community gardens (in the Netherlands) and ecovillages communities (in the United States). Other research interests include social innovation, food sovereignty and community resourcefulness.

Elen-Maarja Trell is an assistant professor in Spatial Planning and Environment at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the role of collective action in creating more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive places. Specific themes include agro-food movements, community resilience to flooding, community resilience in rural areas and climate change adaptation.

ORCID

Elen-Maarja Trell http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4419-6474

References

Allen P, FitzSimmons M, Goodman M, Warner K. 2003. Shifting plates in the agrifood landscape: the tectonics of alternative agrifood initiatives in California. J Rural Stud. 19:61–75.

Annot I 2016. De Wandeling; [accessed 2017 Jul 18]. http://ivankaannot.com/de-wandeling/.

Backbone050. 2015. Groningen:Backbone050; [accessed 2016 Jul 18]. http://www.backbone050.eu/.

Bakker E 2015. The Free Café trekt het nauwelijks. OOG Omroep Groningen. [accessed 2018 Jul 18]. https://www.oogtv.nl/2015/03/free-cafe-trekt-het-nauwelijks/.

Bakker J, Denters B, Oude Vrielink M, Klok PM. 2012. Citizens' initiatives: how local governments fill their facilitative role. Local Gov Stud. 38(4):395–415.

Bernard R. 2018. Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Boonstra B 2015. Planning strategies in an age of active citizenship [dissertation]. Groningen(NL): University of Groningen.

Cameron J, Gibson K, Hill A. 2014. Cultivating hybrid collectives: research methods for enacting community food economies in Australia and the Philippines. Local Environ. 19(1):118–132.

Cameron J, Wright S. 2014. Researching diverse food initiatives: from backyard and community gardens to international markets. Local Environ. 19(1):1–9.

Constance CZ 2017. What if the trucks stop coming?: exploring the framing of local food by cooperative food retailers in New Mexico [dissertation]. Wageningen(NL): University of Wageningen:

Davies A, Edwards F, Marovelli B, Morrow O, Rut M, Weymes M. 2017. Making visible: interrogating the performance of food sharing across 100 urban areas. Geoforum. 86:136–149.

Deuten J. 2015. Effectanalyse locatie Friesestraatweg 137a. Groningen(NL): Jochum Deuten advies en onderzoek.

Dixon J. 2010. Diverse food economies, multivariant capitalism, and the community dynamic shaping contemporary food systems. Community Dev J. 46(S1):i20–i35.

Drake L. 2019. Surplus labor and subjectivity in urban agriculture: embodied work, contested work. Econ Geogr. 95(2):179–200.

Fickey. 2011. 'The focus has to be on helping people make a living': exploring diverse economies and alternative economic spaces. Geogr Compass. 5(5):237–248.

Firth C, Maye D, Pearson D. 2011. Developing "community" in community gardens. Local Environ. 16(6):555–568.

Gemeente Groningen. 2013. Groningen groeit gezond: uitvoeringsprogramma voedselbeleid. Groningen (NL):Groningen Gemeente.

Gibson-Graham JK. 2006. A post-capitalist politics. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gibson-Graham JK, Roelvink G. 2009. Social innovation for community economies. In: Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Mehmood A, Hamdouch A, editors. International handbook of social innovation. Social innovation for community economies. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar; p. 453–465.

Gibson-Graham JK, Cameron J, Healy S. 2013. Take back the economy: an ethical guide for transforming our communities. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Griffin M, Sobal J, Lyson TA. 2008. An analysis of a community food waste stream. Agric Human Values. 26:67–81.

Gritzas G, Kavoulakos KI. 2016. Diverse economies and alternative spaces: an overview of approaches and practices. Eur Urban Reg Stud. 23(4):917–934.

Gross J. 2009. Capitalism and its discontents: back-to-the-lander and freegan foodways in rural Oregon. Food Foodways. 17(2):57–79.

Gustavsson J, Cederberg C, Sonesson U. 2011. Global food losses and food waste, extent, causes and prevention. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Guthman J. 2007. Commentary on teaching food: why I am fed up with Michael Pollan et al. Agric Human Values. 24:261–264.

Harris E. 2009. Neoliberal subjectivities or a politics of the possible? Reading for difference in alternative food networks. Area. 41(1):55–63.

Hassanein N. 2003. Practicing food democracy: a pragmatic politics of transformation. J Rural Stud. 19:77–86.

Hill A 2014. Growing community food economies in the Philippines [dissertation]. Canberra(AUS): The Australian National University.

Holloway J. 2010. Crack capitalism. London: Pluto Press.

Holloway L, Kneafsey M, Venn L, Cox R, Dowler E, Tuomainen H. 2007. Possible food economies: a methodological framework for exploring food production-consumption relationships. Sociol Ruralis. 47(1):1–19.

Holt-Giménez E. 2017. A foodie's guide to capitalism. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Holt-Giménez E, Shattuck A. 2011. Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? J Peasant Stud. 38(1):109–144.

Jonas A. 2009. Money and liberation: the micropolitics of alternative currency movements [book review]. J Econ Geogr. 9:137–139.

Jonas A. 2013. Interrogating alternative local and regional economies: the British credit union movement and post-binary thinking. In: Zademach HM, Hillebrand S, editors. Alternative economies and spaces: new perspectives for sustainable economy. Bielefeld(DE): Majukskel Medienproduktion

Jonker S. 2014 13 Mar. Gratis eten trekt drommen mensen. *De smaak van stad*. [accessed 2016 Jul 18. http://www.desmaakvanstad.nl/nieuws/the-free-cafe-kan-toeloop-nauwelijks-aan/.

Kaika M. 2017. 'Don't call me resilient again!': the new urban agenda as immunology … or … what happens when communities refuse to be vaccinated with 'smart cities' and indicators. Environ Urban. 29(1):89–102.

Kelly P. 2005. Scale, power and the limits to possibilities: a commentary on J.K. Gibson-Graham's "Surplus possibilities: postdevelopment and community economies". Singapore J Trop Geogr. 26(1):39–43.

Larder N, Lyons K, Woolcock G. 2014. Enacting food sovereignty: values and meanings in the act of domestic food production in urban Australia. Local Environ. 19(1):56–76.

Lederman J. 2015. Urban fads and consensual fictions: creative, sustainable, and competitive city policies in Buenos Aires. City and Community. 14(1):47–67.

Madrigal T. 2017. "We are human!": farmworker organizing across the food chain in Washington. In: Peña D, Calvo L, McFarland P, Valle G, editors. Mexican-origin foods, foodways, and social movements. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press; p. 251–290.
Marsden T,Franklin A. 2013. Replacing neoliberalism: theoretical implications of the rise of local food movements. Local Environ. 18(5):636–641.
Marsden T, Franklin A. 2014. Replacing neoliberalism: theoretical implications of the rise of local food movements. Local Environ. 18(5):636–641.
Meesterburrie A, Dupuy L 2018. Spectaculaire winst voor GroenLinks in Groningen. *NRC*. [accessed 2018 Nov 30]. https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/11/21/herindelingsverkiezingen-stembussen-in-37-fusiegemeenten-gesloten-a2756135
Michelini L, Principato L, Iasevoli G. 2018. Understanding food sharing models to tackle sustainability challenges. Ecol Econ. 145:205–217.
Mount P, Andrée P. 2013. Visualising community-based food projects in Ontario. Local Environ. 18(5):578–591.
Naylor L. 2018. Fair trade coffee exchanges and community economies. Environ Plan A. 50(5):1027–1046.
Nestle M. 2002. Food politics: how the food industry influences nutrition and health. Berkeley: University of California Press.
North P. 2007. Money and liberation: the micropolitics of alternative currency movements. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
North P. 2008. A postcapitalist politics [book review]. Prog Hum Geogr. 32(3):477–481.
Patel R. 2008. Stuffed and starved. London: Portobello Books Ltd.
Peña D, Calvo L, McFarland P, Valle G. 2017. Mexican-origin foods, foodways, and social movements. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
Pickerill J, Chatterton P. 2006. Notes toward autonomous geographies: creation, resistance and self-management as survival tactics. Prog Hum Geogr. 30(6):730–746.
Renting H, Schermer M, Ross A. 2012. Building food democracy: exploring civic food networks and newly emerging forms of food citizenship. Int J Soc of Agr & Food. 19(3):289–307.
Rijksoverheid. 2013. Visie lokale energie. Den Haag(NL): Directoraat-generaal Energie, Telecom & Mededinging Directie Energie en Duurzaamheid.
Rosol M. 2012. Community volunteering as neoliberal strategy? Green space production in Berlin. Antipode. 44(1):239–257.
Samers M. 2005. The myopia of "diverse economies", or a critique of the "informal economy". Antipode. 37(5):875–886.
Sarmiento E. 2017. Synergies in alternative food network research: embodiment, diverse economies, and more-than-human food geographies. Agric Human Values. 34:485–497.
Sharp E, Friesen W, Lewis N. 2015. Alternative framings of alternative food: a typology of practice. New Zeal Geogr. 71(1):6–17.
Stadslandbouw Dordrecht. 2016. Freegan kitchen bij door dordrecht; [accessed 2016 Aug 8]. http://stadslandbouwdordrecht.nl/agenda/freegan-kitchen-bij-door-dordrecht-3.
Steel C. 2010. Foodtopia: towards a regional food vision. Groningen(NL): Gemeente Groningen.
TedxUniversity of Groningen. 2015. Free Cafe Groningen: Ivanka Annott; [accessed 2016 Feb 21]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWgJKWkWvow.
Trauger A, Passidomo C. 2012. Towards a post-capitalist-politics of food: cultivating subjects of community economies. Acme. 11(2):282–303.
Ulug C, Horlings L. 2019. Connecting resourcefulness and social innovation: exploring conditions and processes in community gardens in the Netherlands. Local Environ. 24(3):147–166.
Veen E, Dagevos M. 2019. Diversifying economic practices in meal sharing and community gardening. Urban Agric Reg Food Syst. 4(1):1–10.
Watts D, Illbery B, Maye D. 2014. Geography: alternative systems of food provision. Prog Hum Geogr. 1(2005):22–40.
Williams K. 2010. Sustainable cities: research and practice challenges. Int Jour Urban Sustain Dev. 1(1–2):128–132.
Wilson A. 2013. Beyond alternative: exploring the potential for autonomous food spaces. Antipode. 45(3):719–737.
Wilson A. 2015. Sowing the seeds of collective autonomy: An analysis of post-capitalist possibilities in food-based livelihoods [dissertation]. Ottawa (Ontario): Carleton University.
Wingeyer AB, Amado TJC, Pérez-Bidegain M, Studdert AG, Perdomo Varela CH, Garcia FO, Karlen DL. 2017. Soil quality impacts of current South American agricultural practices. sustainability. 7:2213–2242.
Zuidema C, de Boer J. 2017. Resilient energy landscapes: a spatial quest? In: Trell EM, Restemeyer B, Bakema M, van Hoven B, editors. Governing for resilience in vulnerable places. UK: Routledge; p. 15–37.